

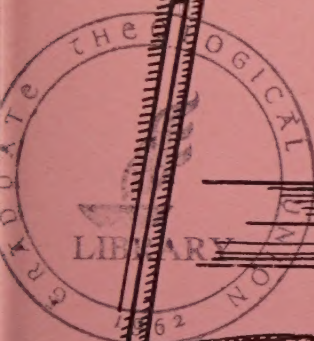
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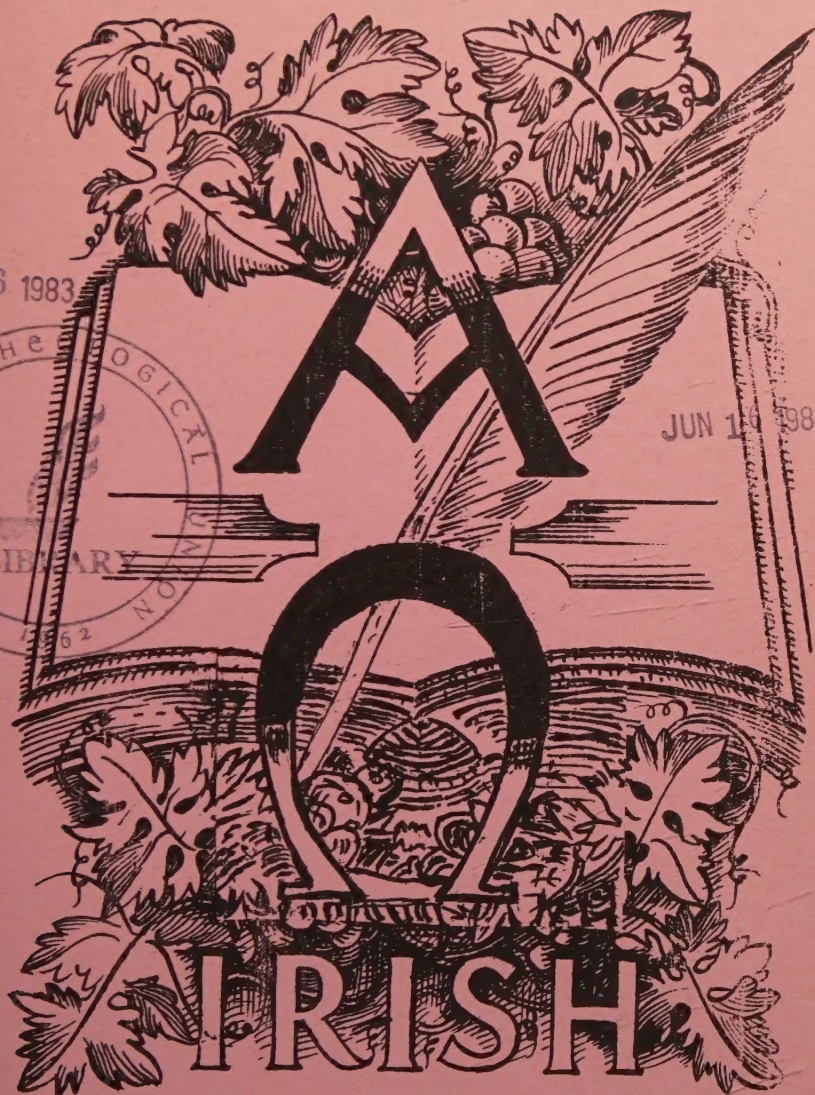
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# IRISH BIBLICAL STUDIES

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Yes and No: Thoughts for a Sermon

Austin Fulton

Where Jesus said "Yes", did Paul say "No"?

Did Jesus give us a simple message which Paul turned into a difficult doctrine? This question, not new, and well-known to readers of Irish Biblical Studies, still evokes conflicting answers. We are not here concerned with these in a general way beyond noting that they set the scene for the one issue which interests me just now. Did Jesus say "Yes" to the structure of Law which we find in the OT, and which he raised to an unattainable higher power, and did Paul, on the other hand, engage in a sustained polemic against it?

Many years ago, I together with two other students arrived early for a theological lecture at Princeton. While waiting we tried to pin-point one word, which, pregnant with revealed truth, could bring forth the whole body of divinity which makes up the Church's faith. One thought "love" to be such a word; another opted for "justice;" the third, with these two words pre-empted, ventured on "theism"! Before we strayed any further from the thought of the living God, Dr Hodge, grandson of Charles Hodge, came into the room. We turned to him with our question, asking, "Is there one such word?" "Of course there is, gentlemen; the word is 'grace'".

There it was, how come that we had not seen it? And Paul so full of it: "by grace are you saved...."; "you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor"; and so on, and so on. But wait; Jesus is not recorded as ever having used the word at all. The Fourth Gospel speaks of "grace and truth", but Jesus never spoke of GRACE. Did Jesus, then, support the LAW in a way that Paul did not? It is true, of course, that Paul lists the oracles of God - Law and Prophets - as Israel's advantages. But there is a sustained thrust of opposition to the Law, conceived as a ladder up which a man could climb to heaven, or obedience to the Law as the way to salvation.



that Jesus came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil; no "I" would be left undotted, nor "T" uncrossed until the whole law is fulfilled, and not only in terms of the catalogue, but of the Sermon on the Mount. What then is Jesus' relation to the Grace which Paul proclaimed?

The answer to this question, putting it very simply, is that where Paul enunciated "principle", or suggested a "doctrine", or conveyed truth by way of verbal propositions, Jesus illustrated the same points with a story, embodied doctrine in action, imparted the teaching in personal encounter, and fulfilled the Law by being himself. Of course he as well as Paul taught with words and imparted truth in propositions. But from the records left to us we are justified in saying broadly, that what Paul taught through words, Jesus taught through acts; what Paul taught by saying, Jesus taught by being. What Paul conveyed in language, Jesus was in life. The Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Paul insisted with intellectual energy, and a conviction born of his traumatic experience of conversion, that salvation is all of grace. This is a gift of God beyond all power of man to achieve, beyond all possibility of purchase, beyond all hope of being earned. It is God's gift of grace in Christ Jesus; and the only way to come by it is to receive it, in Christ, for what it is, God's gracious gift. The source of eternal life is GRACE; grace, with, and under, the very act of obedience and faith in which the gift of grace is received by us. That is the theological truth of the matter. At the level of psychological experience we know the Grace of God as we submit to the Father's will, as we exercise the obedience of faith.

All this Jesus illustrated by telling a story. He told a wonderful short story of a gracious father, the story we call the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Recall it: Two boys in the family of a well-to-do and respected citizen. The older lad was a conventional, pedestrian, outwardly loyal and obedient son of the house. He could be depended upon to do what respectable society expected of him. He was not likely to embarrass the family in any way.

That he could be filled with envy, and devoured by jealousy does not appear until the end of the tale. The younger son was different in every way. He was up and coming, self-centred more than most, entirely "with it". He was out to "do his own thing". Fed up and frustrated with the respectability and monotony of life with father, he could stick it no longer. If the old man would be soft enough to give him a share of the family fortune, he would take it and go. If he had to wait until it came his way in the usual course, he might well be too old to enjoy it. True, it was a difficult situation. The Law laid it down that a son should be stoned to death for blasphemy against a parent. But demanding a share of the property before the proper time could hardly be called blasphemy. Or could it? It was certainly gross disrespect to his father and was proof of a rebellious spirit. It contained a good deal of the reality of blasphemy, whether technically it was that or not. Oh! well, he would try it out anyway. The old man was too soft to take him to law about it in any case. And so he made his demand. And, amazingly, his father raised no objection, something we must conclude since Jesus mentioned none. God, in other words, does not compel us to do what is right if that is not our purpose or will.

Then, escape into freedom, the city lights, the pub and the brothel and the gambling den - the risk of death in a drunken brawl, licentious companions eager to help in wasting his father's wealth. It was great; this was freedom; this was "doing his own thing". But the end was not far off: money spent, companions gone, food and shelter unobtainable, he ends up feeding pigs... and a Jew could imagine no more disgraceful descent in life than that. So now what? The father's house, unattractive as it had seemed a short time ago...became wonderfully attractive now - food, shelter, care, everything a man really needed, safety, security and maybe even a measure of enjoyment. But he had thrown it all away. Well you remember the rest of the story: hoping against hope, he made the journey home...and was received with amazing grace by a rejoicing father!

This is an illustration of the grace of God. The father does not question the honesty of the son's motives in



Returning, how much was sorrow for what he had done, how much a desire to make it up to his father, how much just self-centred opportunism? However much the motives may have been mixed - and a mixture they surely were - one fact was decisive. Returning home with his pleas to be accepted as a slave, did involve submission to his father's will, the obedience of faith, even if it be a minimum faith. But the point being illustrated above all else, is that it is by grace we are saved, and that it is the gift of God.

Or take the case of the woman dragged before Jesus, the woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery and arrested (The story is too good not to be true). The Law demanded death by stoning. What would Jesus do? His attitude was suspect. He allowed mercy to interfere with justice. This case would put him on the spot. If he counselled mercy at the expense of justice, as the Law conceived it, then he would be condoning a capital offence. They could then take Jesus' case from there. So they drag the terrified woman to Jesus: the Law says, Stone her - what do you say? Jesus did not argue about the verdict of the Law. He said nothing at first. He merely wrote something in the dust, we are not told what. But it was something which cut the ground from under their feet. Perhaps it was a word which let them know that he knew more about them than they thought possible....perhaps it was a name or two of places where they had sinned, or people they had sinned with. It was the effect which in other circumstances could be produced by the word "Kincora". /1 It frightened them. The oldest with most to hide were the first to slink away; the rest sullenly followed. "Has no man accused you?" asked Jesus. "No, Lord" - there had been none free from the sin of which she was guilty. "Neither do I", said Jesus, "GO AND DO NOT SIN AGAIN". How amazed, how relieved, how grateful the woman must have been - amazing grace to hear such words. It does not need to be spelled out to us that this woman's response to Jesus embraced the substance of the obedience of faith, just as Jesus embodied the grace whereby he was saved.

It is the same wherever we touch the recorded life and ministry of Christ. Remember the labourers in the vineyard. Recall the crazy economics of their wage scale. It was not so much an hour and so many hours a day, and there was no

recognition of the need for differentials. The workers were each given the same amount, and why not? They all had the same needs, and it took as much to feed the family of those who worked one hour as those who bore the burden and the heat of the day. The principle of "each according to his need and from each according to his ability" is adumbrated long before the arrival of Marxism. Years ago I read Barth's essay on the "Strange New World" within the Bible, and have been discovering the truth of that essay ever since. Strange how grace works! If grace did not work in the way portrayed by Jesus we would have no hope at all - no hope at all because whether a man is a moral giant or a moral leper, whether he is a guardian of the law or a terrorist, whether he is a good man or a bad, whether his driving power is saintly or diabolical, he stands in the same need of grace. The judge on the bench and the assassin in the dock stand under the judgment of God, and stand in the same need of God's grace.

It is of the essence of Grace that it is free. And here is danger; some have spoken and acted as though this meant Grace is cheap. Grace is free. If it were not so, then we could never know it. But it is the most costly gift in time and space.

"Were the whole realm of nature mine

That were an offering far too small".

This is not just the devout breathing of a pious soul. It is hard, inescapable fact. It is the awe-inspiring truth about God's relation to us. The price of the gift is borne by God. Urging love and humility upon the Christians in the church at Philippi, Paul reminds them of the example of Christ Jesus: he did not grasp, and cling to, Godhead.... he emptied himself...abandoned reputation....took the form of a slave...accepted submission to the last enemy...became obedient to death on a cross - the worst and most shameful degrading death which man could inflict on man...a horrible end inflicted by the Romans on traitors and slaves. And looking at the crucifixion gives us knowledge of, but no experience of, the divine agony wrapped up in the human sufferings of Christ.

This brings us to the strange and terrible mystery of Grace - God's "No" and "Yes" to Jesus. The "Yes" of resurrection we easily accept. But the "No" of dereliction



to refuse to face. We see the obedience of which Paul speaks - the obedience unto death - worked out in the garden. There Jesus wrestled with the terrible fate that is upon him. There we see the act of will whereby he laid down his life of himself. There he accepted the awful consequence of fulfilling his Father's will, a fulfilment which includes everything meant by affirming the Law until all be fulfilled. There was hell to be endured because, in the strange words of Paul, he who knew no sin was made sin for us. (2 Corinthians 5.21) "God, why have you left me...why abandoned me?" There is a dark mystery here. Something awful is happening. We have the outward sign but no way of knowing the reality of that to which the sign points. The Fourth Gospel describes it as the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself - and at the same time Jesus is forsaken by God. No one could have imagined that story or invented such a tale. And this is the ultimate revelation of the redeeming Grace of God. When Jesus commends his spirit into his Father's hands. When is the crucified Christ revealed in the risen Lord who bestows the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is the only King and head of the Church.

Jesus said "No" to legalism but "Yes" to that love which is the fulfilling of the Law; that "Yes" of Jesus led to the "No" of God to him at the depth of his humiliation, for only this "No" could bring forth the divine "Yes" of Christ's glorious exaltation.

Does this mystery shed some light on the meaning for us of such words as "knowing the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings? Does it warn us that if Jesus learned obedience through the things which he suffered, this is in some way involved for us when we pray to the Father that, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will enable us to exercise the obedience of faith. I think it does. "Not my will but thine be done". To accept God's "No" is to hear God's "Yes".

The Very Rev Dr Austin A. Fulton is a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; author of "Through Earthquake, Wind and Fire" on mission work in Manchuria and a biography of the late Principal J.E. Davey.

Healing and the New Testament

Ernest Best

The NT scholar is always happy to write a paper on "X and the NT" whatever "X" may be. The churchman usually encourages him and if he likes the results uses them and if he does not ignores them. If we want to discuss healing today, are our guidelines to be laid down by the NT? The way in which we answer that question will determine the use we make of the material in the NT. No direct and formal answer will be given here to the question but it should be borne in mind throughout this essay.

It is important first to identify our subject more exactly. It is referred to under various names: spiritual healing, faith healing, divine healing. "Spiritual" is a vague word and may mean no more than "non-physical"; if it is taken to be a reference to the Holy Spirit then it differs little from "divine healing". Christians are often unhappy with the title "faith healing" because it suggests that the healer or the healed generate within themselves the power which heals. "Divine healing" seems adequate but many would argue that all healing is divine in origin; the doctor cooperates with the way God has made the universe and God heals through the activity of the doctor. Instead of any of these terms, I shall use the simpler and less controversial term "non-medical healing". From another point of view we may seem to be concerned with the nature of miracle. We shall not however occupy ourselves with this question or attempt to define miracle. It is sufficient for our present purpose to accept the factual nature of certain events without attempting to explain them philosophically or theologically and we see no reason to doubt that Jesus did heal by non-medical means, and no reason to deny that such healings take place today.

We find in the NT accounts of healings of different kinds of illnesses: demonic possession, physical disabilities like a withered hand or a paralysis, some ordinary kinds of sicknesses like a fever, and people are brought to life who have died. There is no record of the healing of certain disabilities; new legs and



arms are not given to those who have lost them.

This is very general. When however we examine individual accounts we find serious difficulties in discovering what were the medical conditions which afflicted those who were healed.

(1) It is often difficult to determine from the symptoms as described in the gospel accounts and Acts what the illness was from which the person actually suffered. In Mark 1.40-45 a leper is healed. Did he suffer from leprosy as we know it, i.e. from Hansen's disease? Leprosy is described in the Bible in Lev.13.1-44; 14.54-57; when we examine this we discover that a number of skin complaints are gathered together and described under the term leprosy. Quite clearly the OT allows for successful recovery from some of these diseases for the means by which the recovered person is to be received back into the community and make his peace with God through an offering are described in detail. There is also no suggestion that recovery in these cases is miraculous. Hansen's disease was of course incurable at that time. The difficulty is compounded when we realize that skin complaints can sometimes be psycho-somatic. From what then did the man in Mark 1. 40-45 suffer?

(2) The question of the accuracy of the accounts themselves arises. For a considerable period, at least thirty years, the stories of Jesus were passed on by word of mouth. How accurately were clinical details preserved? In Mark 9. 14-29 Jesus heals a boy who is possessed by an evil spirit; when the same incident is described in Matthew 17. 14-21 the boy is said to be an epileptic. How would a doctor have classified his illness today? Difficulties of another kind arise in the case of the daughter of Jairus( Mark 5. 35-43). Jesus is said to bring her back to life; the presence of mourners confirms this; yet after Jesus has restored her to life he strictly charges those who were present that no one should know this; how was her resuscitation to be kept quiet?

This brings us to another and more difficult question. When we talk about healing in the NT, are we talking about those healings which Jesus performed as he actually performed them and their significance for him, or are we

talking about them as they are used by gospel writers and the significance they see in them? The two may not coincide. Many people have looked on the healing miracles as proofs of the divinity of Jesus but did Jesus perform them in order to prove his divinity and do they prove his divinity? His exorcisms appear to prove his authority and power (Luke 11.20). When Paul and Barnabas come to Jerusalem to defend their evangelisation of the Gentiles they do not make a theological defence of their position but attempt to prove that they are right by relating the signs and wonders that God has done through them (Acts 15.12). Yet when in Mark 8.11-12 the Pharisees come and ask a sign from Jesus so that they may know who he is, he refuses to give them a sign, i.e. he will not prove who he is by working a miracle. Jesus presumably healed people because they were the victims of sickness and because he loved them. He did not use them as tools with which he could convince people who he was. Nor did he heal those who were ill so that others might draw spiritual or theological lessons from what he did; he healed because the sick needed his help.

When we turn to the significance of the stories in the gospels other factors enter. Many scholars hold that the accounts of the healings by Jesus recorded in the gospels of Mark and John were used in the period prior to Mark and John in order to prove the greatness of Jesus and that Mark and John often eliminate this element as they use them. We can discover at least two reasons why the evangelists reported them. (1) Sometimes they draw spiritual lessons from them. The healing of the blind is a sign of the enlightenment of the souls of men through the hearing of the Gospel. Lepers are cleansed and the word used for cleansing is the same as the word used for the cleansing of a person from sin; therefore healing from leprosy represents the forgiveness of sin. Sometimes the word used for healing in Greek is the same as the word used for salvation and we are not sure which way to translate it; the evangelists may imply a deliberate ambiguity. When Jesus says to the woman with the issue of blood, 'Your faith has made you well' (Mark 5.34), the same sentence can be translated, 'Your faith has saved you'; if God through Jesus can heal the bodies of men this means that he can also save them from



sin. (2) The healings by Jesus are also recorded because they serve as examples to the early Christians as to how they should heal. This becomes explicit in Mark 9.28f., the story of the boy who was possessed and whom the disciples are unable to heal during Jesus' absence. After his return he heals the boy and when they are alone with him they ask him why they were unable to exorcize the demon; Jesus replies that demons can only be driven out by prayer. There is a standing instruction to the church as to the way in which healing is to take place: by prayer. There are then a number of reasons for the recording of the healing miracles in the Gospels and Acts. Of course the Evangelists also record the healings for the reason which made Jesus heal, i.e. his love for those who were sick.

Since non-medical healing is often described as faith healing, it is necessary to say a few words about the role of faith. Sometimes the faith is seen to be in the person who is healed. To the woman with the issue of blood Jesus said, 'Your faith has made you well' (5.34). In the case of the paralytic who was let down through a hole in the roof of the house where Jesus was teaching, Jesus says that he saw the faith of the bearers and so healed the man (Mark 2.1-12). It is because of the action of the woman from Syrophenicia who had a daughter possessed by a demon and who had come to Jesus that Jesus, without going to the daughter, healed her; it must have been the faith of the woman that was operative. At other times the faith seems to be that of the healer. When in 9.29 the disciples are told that they can only exorcize by prayer, this implies the importance of faith on their part. This is confirmed by the saying of Jesus about faith being able to remove mountains (Mark 11.23f) and by the associated general statement, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will." But whose faith was operative in the case of the son of the widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus?

What view does the NT take of the origin of illness? The answer is confusing. We have seen that there is a boy who in different gospels is described both as demon-possessed (Mark 9.17) and as an epileptic (Matt 17.15); this would suggest the view that his epilepsy was the result of the activity of Satan. (Does anyone today attempt to exorcize

epileptics?). In Luke 13.10-17 we are told of a woman who for eighteen years could not fully straighten herself because she had a spirit of infirmity and who is also described as bound by Satan for eighteen years. In Acts 10.38 it is said of Jesus that he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil. At other times sickness to be regarded as due to personal sin. In his instructions to the Corinthian Christians about how they should celebrate the Eucharist Paul refers to some of them as ill and some as dead because they have not discerned the body when they ate and drank. Whether 'body' here means the sacramental bread which they ate or the fellowship to which they belonged, it was their sin against it which led to their illness. Yet not all sickness is due to sin. In John 9.3 it is explicitly said of the blind man whom Jesus cured that his illness was due neither to his own sin nor that of his parents. Those who died when the tower of Siloam fell on them did not die because they had sinned (Luke 13.4) (There is no need to assume they all died instantaneously in all such cases some will have had lingering deaths, i.e. they were sick for a period.) Ananias and his wife die as they retain some money that had resulted from their sale of their property; clearly their death was due to their sin (Acts 5.1-11). Thus sickness may or may not be due to sin.

The NT recognizes that healings take place outside the Christian community, or, to put it in another way, healings are carried out by others than Christians. Some of these healings are attributed to the devil; but in these cases they would appear to be the type of healings that are intended to deceive Christians in face of the end of the world, and therefore not healings in general; before the end the "lawless one" would appear and by the activity of Satan he will exert power and show pretended signs and wonders (2 Thess 2.9f; cf. Matt 24.24; Rev 16.14). Acts 19. 11-16 reveals the presence of Jewish exorcists in Corinth. Jesus himself acknowledged their existence as we see from his question, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul by whom do your sons cast them out?" (Luke 11.19) Apart from these references in the NT there is ample evidence within Jewish writings for healing by Jewish men of recognized spirituality, with many accounts of healing



similar to those reported in the NT, including healing at a distance. But it is not only within Judaism that we find evidence of healing; it was a frequent phenomenon in the contemporary pagan world, and was usually closely related to religion. Those who suffered from illness were brought to temples, especially those of Asclepios, and would spend the night there where they might be visited by the god and found restored and well in the morning. Healing outside the area of religion does not seem to have been so well known in the ancient world but at that time it would have been difficult to find any group of people whose activities were wholly unrelated to religion. Thus in the ancient world there was a certain continuity between healing and the spiritual. The spiritual was not, however, necessarily Christian.

There are those who at this juncture might wish to describe non-Christian healing as satanic. Would that entail that medical healing should also be so classified? One day John came to Jesus and said that a man who not an disciple was exorcizing in Jesus' name; the disciples had therefore ordered him to stop. Jesus, obviously approving what the man had done, tells the disciples not to stop him for "He that is not against us, is for us" (Mark 9.39-41). If Jesus allows that a person, not a disciple, is his ally, shall we attribute healing outside the church to Satan? Again the answer of Jesus to those who say he heals by Satan, does not seem to imply that he thinks Jewish healers heal by Satan's power (Luke 11.19). If it is a good thing that evil, i.e. sickness, is defeated we can hardly attribute this good to Satan.

Who were the healers? Apart from Jesus, Acts depicts all the main figures in the early church, e.g. Peter, Paul, as healing. It is, however, curious to note that although healing by Paul (e.g. Acts 15.12) is picked out by Luke as a significant factor, Paul himself in his letters seldom refers to it, as if he did not consider it all that important. Considerable attention has been given to 1 Cor ch.12 where the charismatic gift of healing is mentioned. It is interesting that when Paul lists the gifts of the Spirit elsewhere (Romans 12.4-8; Gal 5.22f; Eph.4.11) he does not list healing among them. It may be that the special conditions of the Corinthians church (remember that, according to Acts, Jewish exorcists were

active in Corinth) led to the emphasis among Christians on healing as a gift of the Spirit. When Paul was writing churches other than Corinth he therefore did not need to refer to the gift of healing since those churches were not so interested in it.

Is non-medical healing in the NT always effective? The majority of scholars believe that Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12. 7-9) was an illness of some kind for which, though he prayed, he did not receive healing. It does not appear that Epaphroditus received spiritual healing (Phil 2.25f). In 1 Tim 5.23 Timothy is advised to take a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent illness. Trophimus was left ill at Miletus (2 Tim 4.20).

The world of the NT which we have been exploring is a very strange world and very different from ours. No one today would expect those who come carelessly or irreverently to the communion service to fall ill during the next week. We would not expect a church session or church body to strike dead someone who did not give as much of their money to the church as they pretended to have done (Acts 5.1-11). The world then was one in which it was easy to accept the idea that supernatural powers of evil were the cause of illness. It was a world which was ready to accept magic as a means of healing; a rabbi is recorded to have healed a demoniac by putting a ring of Solomon to his nose drawing out the demon. More generally, it was a world that was not aware of the distinction we draw between the natural and the supernatural because it had no idea of the laws of nature. This kind of society certainly still exists in many parts of the world today. Even now it is only disappearing from parts of Europe. It is not so long ago in rural areas that if a cow went unexpectedly dry, it was believed that someone had put an evil eye on it; it was hoped that the assistance of a more powerful 'magician' would restore the cow. Today when a cow goes dry, the farmer sends for the vet. We live in a world where we trace sickness to viruses and bacteriae and where medical science is so highly developed that it heals most people. Ordinarily we guide our lives by accepting and co-operating with the laws of nature. We also live in a more individualized world than the NT. The closeness



If the larger family unit was then a matter of course in a way it is not now. When Daniel was delivered from the lion's den his accusers, their children and their wives were thrown into the den (Dan 6.24); we do not condemn the wives and children of criminals. In such a world it was not surprising that healing sometimes took place through the faith of those other than the sick person. Do we not think of faith in a much more personal way? Can a man be saved through the faith of anyone other than himself?

There may, however, be less difference between our world and that of the ancients than I have suggested. Despite universal education there is today a resurgence of belief in magic and superstition, and also of non-medical healings in the ancient world. Is the revival of healing among Christians related to this more general non-rational attitude? If healings are found among non-Christians, are there "spiritual" laws built into the universe through co-operating with which these healings take place?

I have not attempted to give a definitive or even a preliminary answer to the question raised at the beginning concerning the appeal to the NT but have only tried to raise certain issues which must be faced before we simply set out to imitate what happened in the NT. In estimating the extent to which the NT is normative for us in respect of non-medical healing we have thus to take into account the following factors:

- (1) The NT is often unclear as to the nature of the illnesses of those who were healed;
- (2) It gives different answers to the question of why they were healed;
- (3) It ascribes sickness to different theological causes;
- (4) It allows that non-Christian healing exists;
- (5) It indicates that non-medical healings sometimes fail;
- (6) It relates to a very different world from the one in which we live.

Of these the last tends to receive the least attention from those who study and write about the subject, yet it is probably the most important.

Historical Context, Exegesis and Preaching with  
particular reference to Paul's letters

W.S. Campbell

A good sermon is difficult to define. If one stress topical or contemporary interest, there may be less opportunity to acquaint the congregation with the content of the scriptures. Conversely, sermons, however well-intentioned and prepared, which expound biblical doctrine as timeless abstractions requiring to be believed, are a diet which only the healthy and mature bible student can joyfully endure. The aim of this study is to propose that only a truly contextual interpretation of Paul's letters can satisfy the demand for both contemporary (historical) and theological relevance.

1. The Interpretation of Scripture: the need for  
Historical and Theological Exegesis.

For the preacher the day of salvation is always 'now'. Whenever and in whatever context the words of scripture were first spoken or written, in preaching they must challenge their hearers to action; God's word becomes contemporary and the gap between the first century and ourselves is instantly bridged. In this respect we must admit there is a timelessness about the word of God. Because of this quality, preachers are thereby delivered from the limitation of being purely historians of the ancient world. But the question immediately arises - what is the extent of their freedom? Is it legitimate to neglect or simply ignore the original context of a NT letter? F.C. Baur, the father of historical-critical study of the NT /1/ has frequently suffered from a bad image among preachers who have regarded the historical and the critical as very much secondary to the theological.

It was in reaction to an undue preoccupation with analytical historicism on the part of his teachers that Karl Barth asserted that the interpreter's task is to expose "the Word in the words" - to describe and define the religious content of the bible documents. Theology should not be absorbed in the subsidiary disciplines of



archaeology, philology or textual criticism which, in Barth's opinion, should serve only as a preamble to the true interpretation of the Word. /2 Barth's reaction against that "analytical historicism which kills the soul and retains the corpse" /3 was timely and successful. It has been said of his commentary on Romans that it burst like a bombshell on the playground of the theologians. The logical outcome of his emphasis was the replacement of "historical exegesis" by "theological exegesis", /4 and the flowering of the Biblical Theology movement to which this gave birth.

NT scholarship has profited immensely from Barth's prophetic insights. It is noticeable that a great NT scholar such as Ernst Käsemann, though of the Lutheran tradition, nevertheless owes a great debt to Barth. Käsemann, in the preface to his commentary on Romans, states that he felt himself unable to carry out his original commission to revise Lietzmann's "Handbuch" on Romans. To do so he would have had to deny himself and what are for him his present day realities and needs. Thus whilst "nothing from historical scholarship that is essential is withheld", Käsemann's own emphasis in his commentary is on "what Paul meant theologically." /5

Käsemann, in his commentary, has two horizons in view /6 - what Paul meant when he wrote the letter and what Romans has to say to twentieth century Christians. Käsemann's work has never been directed exclusively to academic theology. In his view

"theology has both the commission and the capacity to summon the church to take up the promise which is given to her.....it is for the very purpose of liberating the church for decisive action that theology has to carry out its work of radical and critical questioning." /7

A certain ambiguity arises, however, from Käsemann's theological aims; one is sometimes unclear as to whether in his exegesis of Paul he is not more concerned with theological issues in the contemporary German situation than with Paul's converts and opponents in the first century. In his theological intent, the two horizons are not always distinguished and occasionally merge into one.

Like Bultmann, whose theology he seeks at crucial points correct, and also like Barth - because both of these theologians entered upon their monumental labours in the service of the sermon - /8 Käsemann addresses the problem of translating the gospel into the twentieth century.

In order to avoid the ambiguity noted above, a true concern to interpret Paul's letters in their original historical context, their Sitz im Leben, must be maintained. Proper exegesis demands this in any case. If scripture is to speak to the interpreter, the latter must listen to what the scripture has to say before he can reinterpret its message for his own situation. This means that he can never avoid the question, "What was Paul saying to this congregation when the letter was first written?" In this respect there is no conflict between the historical and the theological approach. In order to be truly theological in our own interpretation we must first of all approach the text historically. Basically, however, the historical aspect may never be disregarded because there exists an indispensable connection between what scripture meant in the first century and what it means for us today. It is this issue we must now consider.

II      What Scripture says today must be consistent with what it said to its first audience

If we are not to use scripture simply as a pretext for promulgating our own opinions, we must always interpret it in context. We cannot lift a text, a chapter or even a letter of Paul from its original first century setting. "Structuralists", in particular, have sought recently to stress the unity in the given text as it now stands - its internal mechanics and the spiritual life in which this text participates and of which it gives unique evidence. We would not wish to limit the work of the Holy Spirit, nor to deny the subsequent history of a text in the life of the Church - consequences caused or stimulated by a given text and its interpretations - what the Germans call "Wirkungsgeschichte"; /9 we must stress, however, that what scripture says to subsequent generations, though it need not be identified with, must at least be consistent with, and in continuity with,



its original intent. Only thus can the historical roots of our faith be secured and a vague, uncontrolled spirituality or mysticism be avoided.

IIA On the Reconstruction and Relevance of the Original Context.

It is by no means always easy to recover the original context of Paul's statements. We are, as it were, near a telephone, hearing only one side of a two-way conversation. /10 We know of Paul's conversation-partners and their beliefs and practices only in respect of what Paul has to say in response to them. Thus any reconstruction of the original context must be somewhat circular. We reconstruct the context from what we understand from the letter and we interpret the letter in the light of this presumed context. There is no escape from this dilemma. /11 What must be made clear is that one possible solution must be excluded.

Since we cannot know with certainty the original context of a letter such as 'Romans', some scholars more or less ignore this issue and concentrate on the theological argument or content. What we might label as scepticism as to the possibility of recovering a viable context in relation to which to interpret the letter's contents, however warranted or otherwise, does not justify the ignoring of the original Sitz im Leben. If we cannot possibly reconstruct the context in some measure, we are not thereby excused from attempting to consider the issue - and then proceeding to interpret Romans as if Paul had written in the sixteenth or twentieth century and not in the first. Lack of solid information here means that all attempts at interpretation are equally precarious. Thus those scholars who, wittingly or by implication, interpret Romans as a timeless summary of Paul's theology, instead of presuming that they have a good foundation for what they are doing and denigrating all attempts to recover the original aim and occasion of the document, should admit with due circumspection the essentially imperfect nature of their own enterprise.

An interesting example of this emerges in connection with

Paul's supposed ignorance of the situation at Rome and the Romans' ignorance of Paul's gospel. It is proposed that since Paul intends to visit the Christians in Rome, he see them by way of introduction a sample of his gospel or theology, i.e. the letter to the Romans. Though it be granted that this letter is a theological document of some substance, how can we, on the basis only of the known fact that Paul has not yet visited Rome, claim with certainty that Romans is a letter of self-introduction? Nor is it any more satisfactory to maintain it arises from Paul's own missionary situation at the moment of writing - this gives no real basis for Paul's writing to the Romans at all. Equally unconvincing is the view that Romans was meant to be a circular letter addressed to several churches simultaneously. /12 Although there is some textual evidence which until recently could have been taken to support the latter view, the view that Romans is written to introduce Paul or that its content is determined other than by the situation at Rome, is pure speculation. /13 However, the absence of certain basic emphases of Pauline theology, and the presence of certain specific references in chs. 9-11 of the failure of fellow-Jews to believe the gospel, indicate how poor a solution this is to the question of why Paul actually wrote the letter to Rome. If the letter is not a complete outline of Paul's theology on what basis did he choose to include or to omit if not in relation to the context in which the letter was written, /14 particularly the needs of those to whom it was first addressed. We are somewhat sceptical of these attempts to label Romans as a standard outline of Paul's theology. However well-intentioned such attempts may be to localize Paul's theology, the fact is that we do not possess the sort of systematic summary of his theology that some desire. What is more significant in our opinion is that Paul himself, we believe, would have regarded such an abstract summary - because this is what it would have to be - as not being in the best interests of Christian faith. We assert, therefore, that however great the problems involved may be, we can only discover what Paul's letters are saying to the Church today when we first of all endeavour to discover what they said in the first century. To do otherwise



leads to certain misconceptions which have been a source of conflict in the history of the Church, and not least in the relationship between Christians and Jews. /15

This is not to deny that certain parts of Paul's letters can more readily be interpreted as timeless theology than others. For example, Paul's argument in Romans 6 concerning the Christian's death to sin through being united with Christ in baptism can rightly be regarded as calling for Christians today (as in all ages) to reckon themselves to be dead to sin and to live to God. The actual historical setting seems relatively unimportant compared with the ongoing theological significance of basic Christian doctrine. /16

However, two other examples from Romans are of a very different nature. Paul uses the imperative again in Ch.11.13f. Presumably he is still commanding and exhorting the same Christian community in both instances. In ch.11 he warns the Gentile Christians not to be proud and to stand in awe that they have been allowed to share in the richness of the olive tree; they are to remember that they do not bear the root but the root bears them. We could treat these verses as timeless statements about dependence and humility but we would lose a great deal of the original content if we were to do so. In fact, the history of the interpretation of Romans 9-11 demonstrates that because the original context ( i.e. warning to proud Gentile Christians) has been ignored or overlooked, these chapters, which were meant to remind Gentile Christians that they share Israel's blessings only by the miraculous grace of God, came to be read as an arid discussion on a very speculative type of predestination. /17 Worse still, they were sometimes used to implement and uphold a doctrine of arbitrary divine freedom which meant that the concept of God's faithfulness to his ancient people was completely denied.

Sometimes, too, Paul has been criticized for being too patriotic, too tied to Judaism still, so that he did not pursue to their proper conclusion the logic of his own premises. It could even be argued that he was just not anti-Jewish enough; at least this is how a Canadian scholar

has recently summed up C.H. Dodd's comments on Paul in his famous commentary on Romans. /18 The main point we wish to stress here is that although Romans 9-11 are now generally regarded as being the most pro-Jewish chapters in the whole of Paul's writings, because of a neglect of their original context, in the history of interpretation they have often been interpreted in a most anti-Jewish direction.

Romans 13. 1-7 is also exceedingly important in this respect. These verses have been used to enforce obedience on the part of Christians to their rulers whether worthy, just or otherwise. The contra indication of the Emperor as anti-Christ in the Revelation of St. John was often therefore discreetly overlooked. Recent studies of the first century setting behind Romans 13 show that it relates to a very specific instance of citizens rebelling against the payment of too harsh taxes. /19 Whether on the basis of this specific instruction to the Christians in Rome, we can generalize and argue that Paul would command obedience to those in authority at all times is another matter - but his own manner of life would not lead one to that conclusion.

Despite the apparent exception of passages such as Romans 6, the danger of detaching the scriptures from their original historical context is such that we believe it causes great misconceptions to arise within the church. Those who are concerned solely with the theological content but see no relevance in its historical foundations are on dangerous ground - we will return to this theme in our concluding section.

## II B Paul's Use of Scripture.

It may be objected that the thesis we propose here concerning the place of the historical context and the original meaning of scripture is contradicted by Paul's own use of scripture. In the understanding of Paul in the first half of this century, it has been axiomatic that his exposition of scripture is the weakest component

of his proclamation and of absolutely no use to us. Associated with this understanding of Paul is the view that he uses scripture as proof-texts, material to bolster up or adorn an argument of his own creation. /20 When we remember also the tendency to see Paul as a solitary religious genius whose views are explicable in contrast to, rather than in continuity with, first century Judaism, then it comes as no surprise that Paul's exegesis of scripture is held to be entirely his own!

More recent study of Paul's Jewish background, and of the scriptural exegesis of Rabbinic Judaism demonstrates, however, that Paul stands in real continuity and in an ongoing dialogue with the scriptural exegesis of his contemporary Jews. He differs from them in that he regards Jesus as the Messiah and interprets the biblical story in the light of the Christ-event. But the presupposition and pattern of Paul's use of scripture is the Jewish understanding and methods of interpretation of the first century. /21 Nor can we explain Paul's use of scripture or his theology simply as a result of Hellenistic influences upon Diaspora Judaism. It is no longer meaningful to draw a sharp distinction in Paul between Jewish or Palestinian influences and those from Hellenistic culture. /22 Even the Qumran community could not escape the latter.

We are not seeking here to prove that Paul's view of scripture is identical with our own! Rather what we aim to show is that by the standards and practices of his own time, Paul was a competent and serious exegete. W.D. Davies writes

"Although Paul exploits Hellenistic forms and literary genres, he takes seriously the scriptures of his people and seeks to deal with the problem in their terms - employing rabbinical and other methods to do justice to this new emergence, the Christian community, and its matrix, the Jewish people."

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In any case we wish to maintain that Paul is not a model for the casual or unsystematic use of scripture.



A.T. Hanson makes this point very clearly:

"When we today speak of understanding a passage of scripture in its context we mean studying the actual historical circumstances in which the passage was written. Because the NT writers had very little notion of doing this, they are often accused of an atomistic use of scripture. They take isolated texts, it is said, from a wide variety of contexts and use them as ammunition against their opponents, completely ignoring the context in which they occur. This, I believe, is unjust. It is always worthwhile to study the context in which a scripture text cited in the NT occurs in its original format. It frequently transpires that the NT writer has made a careful study of the context and is fully alive to its significance. ~~strange~~ though his idea of significance might seem to us."

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Careful investigation shows that though Paul may cite only a small portion of a given passage, often this citation is a pointer to the wider context and a comparison between this and Paul's use of the text reveals a deep and close affinity in spirit and content between the two. As Romans 9-11 illustrates, Paul does not quote scripture merely to confound his fellow Jews with their own weapons or to demonstrate that the scripture is the sole property of the church. Rather his own understanding of the gospel - of the entire Christian dispensation - was that it was "according to the scriptures". These chapters do not square with the view that Paul is merely an adept user of proof texts. /25 The discussion here concerns the history and destiny of Israel as understood in the scriptures. Paul explores, listens to, and expounds a heritage which he shares with his fellow-Jews. Here more than anywhere

else, he is careful not to force a christological interpretation arbitrarily upon the scriptures he cites. The greater part of chapters 9-11 is comprised of major and minor or supplementary citations and Paul's understanding of these in his own words. /26 By setting out the texts and giving his own interpretation alongside, Paul demonstrates his concern to listen to scripture and to interpret it on its own terms. The failure of modern interpreters of Paul is that we have not always paid sufficient attention to what Paul himself considers the citation to say. Suffice to say with Markus Barth:

"Paul used eagerly and skilfully the methods of exegesis that were usual in the synagogues and in the schools. They range from apparent verbal hair-splitting (Gal 3.16) to exegesis by word association (gezer ah shawa, Rom 4.3-8) to the boldest allegories and the collection of catenae of verses from the Law, the Prophets and the writings (haraz, strings of pearls) in a midrashic exposition."

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## IIC The "Sensus Plenior" of Scripture

To defend Paul's use of scripture is not to deny that he is, in some respects at least, the forerunner of many who have argued for the "sensus plenior" of scripture. In 2 Cor 3 Paul refers to the action of the Holy Spirit which, having now been poured out, illuminates the scriptures in a new way. In this reinterpretation, Paul continues a process which was ongoing in the OT whereby the earliest traditions were frequently reinterpreted by prophets and wise men in the light of present and future events. It is not only the OT that Paul interprets. He takes up early Christian hymns and creedal statements and reinterprets them in his terminology e.g. Romans 3. 21-2

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation through his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins"

Recently Raymond Brown /28 and others have reminded us that such questions as the "intentio auctoris" do not present the only possible or the final criterion of an exposition faithful to the text. Through contemporary events whether caused or permitted by him, God can open the eyes of believers to what previously had been hidden.

It has been argued, for example, that it is only since the Holocaust that the strong anti-Jewish bias of some NT interpretations has become evident. /29 Perhaps Romans 2.1 would serve as an example here. Even though the "therefore" connects it with 1.18-32 where the sins of Gentiles are in view, it has been customary to take this verse as referring to Jews simply because it deals with hypocrisy. Rather than pursue this discussion further we note two points in passing. Firstly in relation to the reinterpretation by prophets etc., it was on the basis of the earlier revelation that these men were given the critical faculty to discern the new act or reinterpretation of the divine. This indicates a measure of control and of continuity between the earlier and later interpretations. Secondly, this discloses that there is a certain coherence, consistency and continuity of revelation so that that which may legitimately be expected or hoped for should be in keeping with that which has already been experienced. We insist therefore that there must always be a measure of control exercised in understanding the sensus plenior of scripture in relation to contemporary events. If this is



not so, we will be left to the mercy of undisciplined or arbitrary innovation whereby, in speaking with tongues or other charismatic utterance, we may relapse to that strange contradictory stance of some early Christians who claimed in the Spirit that Jesus was accursed!

### III The Contextual Interpretation of Scripture

In the first part of this article we have maintained that the historical context of Paul's letters ought never to be ignored because his letters did not originate and therefore can never be interpreted, as timeless or abstract theology. To treat them as such results in both a wrong view of Paul as a theologian and also of scripture. If we fail to see scripture as arising out of concrete situations in historical life, we may tend to regard it in a magical sort of way as timeless truth of an abstract nature with a fixed interpretation. In differing situations Paul was led to say different things. Of circumcision he writes in Galatians 5.2, "If you receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing", but in Romans 2.25 he says, "For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law". Only the context of these letters explains what seems an apparent contradiction. Paul did not sit down to write a systematic theology. If anything, he was a missionary theologian - his theology was intensely practical. Nevertheless there is a coherence in his theology despite the fact that he accommodated himself to differing historical circumstances and "became all things to all people". /30

It was basically the problems in his churches that led Paul to make theological statements. Thus what we know of Paul's theology is, in one respect at least, a by-product of historical circumstances. Had it not been for a debate about Gentile Christians accepting circumcision, we might not have had Paul's teaching on Christian freedom in Galatians; had it not been for disunity and disputes about the resurrection in Corinth, we might not have had the famous chapter on unity within the body, and chapter 15 on the resurrection of the dead might not have been written. It was these first century events what

we might call "non-theological " factors, often, in fact, the failings and mistakes of his converts, that led to Paul's theology finding written expression. Paul's theology was formulated in the face of the conflicts and confrontations of everyday life and was intended effectively to influence people and events in the contemporary scene. /31 What was true for Paul, is also true for all periods of history; living theology is always missionary or evangelical. It emerges from, and relates to, the specific needs of human life in particular concrete situations.

### IIIA

### History and Exegesis

If, as we have claimed, theology does not originate in a vacuum, neither can exegesis be divorced from historical circumstances. As Gese says,

"God's revelation of himself to humans is neither timeless nor related to one point of time"

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This connection between exegesis and history has two dimensions. Thus far, our stress has been on the original context of Paul's letters, what we might term their primary horizon. But if it is wrong to ignore the historical context of Paul's letters, it is likewise mistaken to ignore the historical context of the exegete. We may be proud to call ourselves Lutherans or Calvinists but it would be foolish to forget the centuries that have elapsed since the Reformation and its differing course in such countries as England, Scotland or Ireland. Barth was proud to call himself a Calvinist and yet how different is his theology at crucial points from that of Calvin. The sharing of a common tradition is deeply significant but so too are the centuries that separate adherents of the same tradition. The place of the exegete both in his tradition and in his own historical setting must be carefully considered, especially when we are using older commentaries or texts.

We feel, therefore, that it is necessary at this point to take issue with Barth's view of history and its relevance for exegesis. Writing in 1919, Barth demanded that we endeavour "to see through and beyond history" into the spirit of the bible which is "the Eternal Spirit". He then proceeded to give an interpretation that did not inquire about Paul's message to his original readers, but related the biblical text directly to the situation of his own day. He acknowledged that Paul as a child of his age had of course addressed his contemporaries, but in Barth's view

"It is, however, far more important that, as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age. The differences between then and now, there and here, no doubt require careful investigation and consideration. But the purpose of such investigation can only be to demonstrate that those differences are, in fact, purely trivial... If we rightly understand ourselves, our problems are the problems of Paul; and if we be enlightened by the rightness of his answers, these answers must be ours....."

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Although it is, as Barth himself admitted, a matter of emphasis here, we believe that Barth's position, however relevant in 1919, will not do for us today. The historical dimension must not be underplayed.

# IIIB The Pre-Understanding of the Interpreter.

Perhaps by setting out a false position, our own view may become clearer. Some exegetes feel that they are not really influenced by their historical circumstances. Thiselton notes that

"Theologians who have been trained in the traditions of German philosophy find little



"in taking seriously the double-sided nature of historicity, or historical conditionedness on the part of both the ancient text and the modern interpreter. However, a number of British and American scholars seem to view the problem as a merely theoretical one which is only of peripheral concern to the NT interpreter."

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However sincerely we may try to be objective in our judgements, we remain men of our day and cannot entirely dissociate ourselves from its culture and ethos. The history of exegesis is a clear demonstration that this is so. The same passages of scripture have been interpreted so differently in different periods of history and in different parts of the world that anyone aware of this history cannot be unaware of the influence of one's own situation and tradition upon interpretation. Text and tradition go hand in hand - there never was a time when scripture was not accompanied by interpretation. /35 A text cannot legitimately be conceived of as existing in a vacuum. So too the exegete when he considers that text. When he sees, he sees in relation to his own history and tradition past and present. His perception is related to where he himself stands and this stance may itself be the product of certain dominant epochs or influences in his past history. The wise preacher will acknowledge that, to a certain degree at least, the truth of God which he sees is the truth of God as it is for him. This is not to deny the need for, but actually demands, a more critical self-understanding and evaluation so that, though the gospel message comes via a particular individual in his own specific historical context, as far as humanly possible this person allows the word of God to judge and to restrain his personal prejudices. It goes without saying that he will make use of every available piece of information and guidance both with respect to the scriptures and to human life also, so as to equip himself the better for this task.

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IIIC The Application of the Gospel Message to the Contemporary Context.

One other aspect of a truly contextual interpretation must now be considered. From its original context, the word of God comes to the context of the interpreter. The preacher's task is then to proclaim this word in a particular context - a specific 'missionary' situation. Some perhaps would maintain that the context to which the message is proclaimed is secondary, perhaps even irrelevant. But there is no disputing the fact that it was particular concrete situations that determined largely the content of Paul's letters. The word of God to be the word of God must be a word of God to a particular concrete situation or issue where the only response can be, 'Here I stand, I can do no other.' However excellent Calvin's sermons may have been for sixteenth century Geneva, they are not ideal for twentieth century Ireland. Each region of the world has its own peculiarities and culture and the gospel must be allowed to work a transformation in every culture. In this respect, at least, one culture is every bit as good as another.

Thus we need an Indian theology, a Water-Buffalo theology or an Irish theology. We believe that the truly contextual interpretation of scripture demands an application of the gospel to the specific needs of the place of proclamation. Generalities are inadequate; for the word of God to act as a 'two-edged' sword, it must be related to specific issues so that it will judge, refine and prune whatever sinful society is in need. Only thus do we take both theology and history seriously. We take theology seriously because we take into account the historical context and tradition of interpretation of the text, the history of the interpreter and his tradition, but, above all, we take seriously the peculiar history of those to whom the message is addressed. The actual reality of everyday life whether in South Africa or Northern Ireland - the endless insecurity, the cheapness of human life, the fear of one's neighbour, these are forces of such magnitude in determining the entire pattern of a community's life that they just cannot be ignored. Not should they in fact be ignored. If scripture had nothing to say specifically

upon issues such as these, however relevant it would be.

There is also the danger that when scripture is not applied to the specific evils of any society, the scripture may then be manipulated by men to become a demonic instrument, used for their own ends and not for the glory of God. Some such judgment seems to be in the mind of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches when they recently expelled some South African Churches and declared apartheid to be a heresy.

A view fundamental to this article is that history must be taken with the utmost seriousness. The Lord of history does not ignore the vicissitudes of this earthly life but, in his good purpose, the eternal life springs out of, and is achieved, through the history of mortal life. Christian eschatology does not hold that the eternal is the opposite of the temporal or historical. The historical life is the preparation, the seed-bed for the eternal and there is real continuity by God's grace between them, not simply absolute antithesis. We would stress in conclusion that this view of historical contextuality is genuinely ecumenical. It allows for the emergence of a regional or national tradition of Christianity but does not seek to press for a uniformity of worship or conduct. There is here a sense of freedom which is essential to the Christian Gospel. By taking all these contexts into account, we can be both historical and theological in our proclamation.

## Notes

1. Cf W.G. Kummel, The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of its Problems, Abingdon, 1972, pp127f
2. K. Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, 1935<sup>6</sup>, p15
3. Cf R. Kroner, "History and Historicism", Journal of Bible and Religion, XIV (3), 1946, p132
4. Cf Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins, Oxford 1964, p22 and Kummel, op.cit., p36f
5. Commentary on Romans, London 1980, p.vii



1. See the outstanding study on hermeneutics by A.C. Thistleton, The Two Horizons, Exeter 1980, p10f
2. New Testament Questions of Today, London 1969, p.x
3. Cf. Fred Craddock's excellent book on preaching and sermon preparation, As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching, Enid, Oklahoma 1971, p39
4. Cf. Markus Barth, "St. Paul - A Good Jew", Horizons in Biblical Theology, An International Dialogue 1, 1979, p7f
5. Cf Paul Minear, The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, SBT, London 1971, p7
6. Cf. H. Gamble, The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans, Studies and Documents, Vol 42, ed. I.A. Sparks, Grand Rapids 1977, p132
7. Cf. the writer's articles, "Why did Paul write Romans?", ET, LXXXV (1973-4), pp 264-269 and "Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter", NovT XXIII, 1981, pp22-40
8. Gamble's study surveys the textual evidence and he concludes that Romans is a letter only to Rome, op.cit. p137
9. The writer has attempted to reconstruct the situation which Paul may have addressed in Romans, "The Freedom and Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel", JSNT (Studies in Honour of A.T. Hanson), Vol 13, 1981, pp27-45
10. On this, see M. Barth's excellent survey, op.cit.p14f
11. See, for example, J.D.G. Dunn's article, "Salvation Proclaimed": VI. Romans 6.1-11, ET, Vol 93, 1982, pp 259-264

17. We are not suggesting that John Calvin was responsible for all the varying forms of this doctrine which his own treatment may have inspired! Barth's solution - though he (rightly) called himself a Calvinist, was to take a different starting point from that of Calvin, Church Dogmatics 11(2), The Doctrine of God, Edinburgh 1957, p35f
18. Cf. L. Gaston, "Israel's Enemies in Pauline Theology" a paper presented at the SNTS meeting in Rome, 1981 to be published in NTS.
19. Cf. J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann, P. Stuhlmacher, "Die historische Situation und Intention von Römer 13. 1-7." ZTK 73, 1976, pp131-166.
20. Cf. A. Julicher, Römerbrief, in Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments, 1908, p249 and, more recently, P. Vielhauer, "Paulus und das Alte Testament", in L. Abramowski and J.F.G. Goeters, Studien zur Geschichte und Theologie der Reformation, Festschrift für E. Bizer, 1969, p45f
21. Cf. W.D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, Philadelphia, 1981, p.xx1f; A.T. Hanson reminds us that although the christological interpretation of scripture was dominant among the early Christians, yet "by concentrating their attention on certain parts of scripture and paying less attention to the rest, they admitted that some parts of scripture were more amenable to christological interpretation than others", The NT Interpretation of Scripture, London 1980, p14f.
22. Cf. Davies, op.cit. p xxif
23. "Paul and the People of Israel", NTS 24, 1979, p14
24. Op.cit. p7; cf. also Hanson's previous studies, Jesus Christ in the OT, London 1965, pp145-147 and Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology, London

1974, especially ch.11, p225f

25. W.D. Davies, in the preface to Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (N.21 above) criticizes E.P. Sanders' book, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, (London 1977) for failing to appreciate Paul's radical seriousness in his use of scripture because Sanders insists that Paul's use was governed by the dogmatic stance that salvation is only in Christ (Sanders, p482). Sanders himself draws attention to the fact that Paul, in the course of his argument in Galatians 3 in which he wants to show that Gentiles are righteous by faith, cites only two passages in the LXX in which the dikai root is connected with pistis (Gen 15.6; Hab 2.4) - "Paul and the law; Different Questions, Different Answers", paper given at SNTS meeting, Toronto 1981.
6. E.E. Ellis holds that Romans 9.26-29 is a good example of the proem midrash as used in the synagogue Prophecy and Hermeneutic, Tübingen 1978, p155. The writer has made a detailed study of "Paul's Use of the OT in Romans 9-11" for an SNTS study seminar (Durham 1979), not yet published.
7. Op.cit. p15
8. The Sensus Plenior of Scripture, New York 1955
9. Cf. F.W. Marquardt, Die Juden im Römerbrief, Theological Studies 107, Zurich 1971 and G. Klein's objection to the use of "genocide as a surrogate for theological arguments" in "Erbarment mit den Juden", EvTh 34, 1974, pp201-218
0. Cf J.C. Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Thought and Life, Edinburgh 1980
1. Cf B. Gerhardsson, The Ethos of the Bible, Philadelphia 1981, pp88f
2. H. Gese, Essays on Biblical Theology, Augsburg 1981, p25.



33. The Epistle to the Romans, Oxford<sup>6</sup>, 1933 p1
  34. The Two Horizons, op.cit. 12
  35. Cf Hanson, The NT Interpretation of Scripture, p4.
  36. On the need for Christians to take into account new empirical data, see J.B. Nelson, Embodiment, Augsburg 1978, p199f
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Nosegays Which edify from Behind

Reflections on  
"Little Gidding" by T.S. Eliot

H.F. Woodhouse

To expand and explain my subtitle, "Nosegays which edify from behind", will serve instead of a much longer introduction about T.S. Eliot's poetic outlook, methods, background and ideas which would be necessary for a full appreciation of any of the five movements of "Little Gidding" or even of any one movement. /1

The idea of a nosegay as a description of spiritual food comes from St. François de Sales( d.1622). In those days people had not our resources, or even concern with hygienic matters and methods that we have. The "upper classes", however, often mitigated the strong smells, sometimes from their own persons, by using nosegays, bunches of flowers whose pungent, pleasant perfume purified the atmosphere. Similarly, devotional ideas conducive to spirituality can sweeten and purify life and character.

To understand the significance of the latter part of the phrase we skip two centuries and find in Kierkegaard the phrase "thoughts which wound from behind". This phrase I have adapted to describe what the reading of the last of T.S. Eliot's four quartets can achieve, of which "Little Gidding" is one.

To me, some of his writings, some of St. François de Sales' writings and "Little Gidding" are, in at least one respect, like the Word of God. They are alive and active, piercing into the inmost recesses of the heart and also, like a sword, they can wound by glancing blows as well as by direct thrusts but, unlike most wounds, all three, again like God's word, can profit.

"Little Gidding" by T.S. Eliot

I believe it will help to provide a brief synopsis of the five movements.

The first movement speaks of a "springtime not in time's covenant" /2 which the pilgrim to Little Gidding can experience. It develops associations with the haven for pilgrims and refers to others where pilgrims have found fulfilment of purpose.

If you came this way,  
Taking the route you would be likely to take  
From the place you would be likely to come from,  
If you came this way in may time, you would find the  
hedges

White again, in May, with voluptuary sweetness.  
It would be the same at the end of the journey,  
If you came at night like a broken king,  
If you came by day not knowing what you came for,  
It would be the same, when you leave the rough road  
And turn behind the pigsty to the dull facade  
And the tombstone. And what you thought you came for  
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled  
If at all.

But the conditions, of proper prayer, for example, must be observed: Then the temporal and eternal can intersect:

You are here to kneel  
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more  
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation  
of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.  
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,  
They can tell you, being dead: the communication  
Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of  
the living.

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment  
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

The second movement emphasizes the transience of things earthly, recounts a discussion between Eliot and a "dead master" as an air raid ends. They reflect on man's restlessness, some biblical ideas and the possibility of rest but realize that old age does not automatically bring the latter for the human spirit needs to be purified and refined:



Woodhouse, Nosegays, IBS 5, April 1983

Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age  
To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort.  
First, the cold friction of expiring sense  
Without enchantment, offering no promise  
But bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit  
As body and soul begin to fall asunder.  
Second, the conscious impotence of rage  
At human folly, and the laceration  
of laughter at what ceases to amuse.  
And last, the rending pain of re-enactment  
Of all that you have done, and been; the shame  
Of motives late revealed, and the awareness  
Of things ill done and done to others' harm  
Which once you took for exercise of virtue.

In the third, three attitudes to life - attachment,  
detachment and indifference - are sketched and illustrated.

There are three conditions which often look alike  
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:  
Attachment to self and to things and to persons,  
detachment  
From self and from things and from persons; and,  
growing between them, indifference

Which resembles the others as death resembles life,  
Being between two lives - unflowering, between  
The live and the dead nettle.

Later, a fourth - transfiguration and its effects - is  
outlined. The hope of purification - all shall be well -  
receives some development. Motives can be purified

And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
By the purification of the motive  
In the ground of our beseeching.

In this section several salient media are mentioned -  
experiences, memories, history, freedom, words and music.

The next short lyrical fourth movement could be  
regarded as a most suggestive exposition of ideas latent  
in some biblical words, especially fire, love and redeemed,  
whose exposition I develop. The Holy Spirit's work is

central.

The last movement hints at completion and perfection not only in the poet's craft but in creative living. There are parabolic allusions to the Christian life, a voyage of exploration into God and the hints of earlier movements and quartets are shown to be capable of realisation.

What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from. And every phrase  
And sentence that is right.....  
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a  
beginning,  
Every poem an epitaph. And any action  
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's  
throat  
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start...  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

#### Little Gidding: The Fourth Movement

These short lyrics, forming the fourth movement of the quartet, seem to me to contain more specific Christian content than almost any other passages of similar length:

The Dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror  
Of which the tongues declare  
The one discharge from sin and error.  
The only hope, or else despair  
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre -  
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.  
Love is the unfamiliar name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of flame  
Which human power cannot remove.

We only live, only suspire  
Consumed by either fire or fire.

This content is deepened by probing the allusions and the meaning of other verbal devices so characteristic of Eliot, e.g. that in *Burnt Norton* has the ideas of time, bell, cloud, sun (son) flower symbolism, yew, light, stillness, as well as the main stress on death, that of Christ. In *East Coker*, the corresponding lyric, using a sustained metaphor, that of a surgeon, himself wounded, healing the patient, stresses both the atonement and the eucharist and their results. Prayer and the role of the Virgin Mary are main topics of the fourth movement of *Dry Salvages*. Here in *Little Gidding*, the centre is the Holy Spirit pouring out the love of God abroad.

It may also be justifiable here to maintain that these other lyrics touch "allusively on moments in the institutional life of the Church at which the eternal intersects the temporal", e.g. burial in *Burnt Norton*, in *East Coker* where the reference to the Eucharist is obvious, in *Dry Salvages* to prayer and the Angelus bell. In this lyric that reference is made to absolution. /2

In the first stanza of this short lyric, Eliot, by the use of a modern phenomenon illustrates a biblical event and also a type of religious experience. One of his verbal devices to do so is the double meaning found in the words, dove, tongues, fire and discharge. The obvious reference to the first two lines of this section refers back to the flight and mission of a German raiding plane (one kind was called Die Taube, the dove). In the earlier reference Eliot speaks of its "flickering tongue" representing the flames, started by the incendiaries "discharged" by the plane as it flew over London where Eliot lived and was a firewarden.

### The Fire of the Lifegiver

But there is a second, a religious meaning. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So is the idea of fire. His appearance on the first day of Pentecost to those followers of Jesus gathered in the upper room is described as resembling "cloven tongues as



of fire". /3 But the tongues of fire also can represent the gifts of the Spirit by means of which the Christian receives a "discharge" from sin and error. Further, such phenomena, in the context of the raiding aeroplane formed the flame of incandescent terror and the "discharge" of fire bombs from the plane might well cause death, itself a type of discharge or release from sin and error.

Both the aeroplane and the Spirit (the dove) discharged their mission in each sense of the verb. Now, however, the parallel ceases.

The result of the Spirit's action is that humanity can have the hope of "discharge from sin and error", So Blamires may be quite right in hinting that this phrase recalls the scriptural promise to the disciples, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" and the prayer of absolution. /4 Especially is this so since references to the Holy Spirit in this lyric could be understood to correspond to those references to God, Christ and the Virgin Mary in the lyrics in the other quartets.

From a different angle we can say that Eliot, with his strong Anglicanism, is thinking of institutional practices of the church, especially absolution. (It is worth reading the corresponding lyrics as referring to activities of the church at worship, the scene where the eternal is most likely to intersect the temporal.)

Whether these surmises are correct guesses or no, the possibilities mentioned in these lines give rise to hope since, when we realize how we have failed, unless we turn, we may despair. Again, we are faced with a choice between two, and only two alternatives. Despair is the opposite of hope; as the Latin root shows, it means without hope.

The consequence of our choice is that we are faced with the fire of destruction or the fire of purification; we are redeemed from the former by the action of the latter. Only when selfishness has been burnt up are we "freed unto selflessness."

In this context there may well be the background of a classical allusion to Heracles contained in the phrase, "i tolerable shirt of flame". Similarly, Dame Helen Gardner uses a quotation which speaks of a shirt "soaked with blood". Does this suggest the blood of Christ? Heracles was in agony because the shirt on his back was poisoned; it had become unbearable and the only way he was able to free himself was to kindle a fire and throw himself upon it. Then he ascended to heaven.

Eliot uses the word "love" in this connection with "torment" (1.210) . The use is justified because the purpose of the torment here mentioned was redemption, an act of love. Here is a case where love's methods can sometimes be severe. So the use of the word "love" may well be called "unfamiliar" especially as we are speaking of God; a fact which Eliot has signified by spelling "name" with a capital "N". (It may help in this connection to remember that God's hands are "pierced" hands. More tentatively, I mention a second point, viz, adjectives that we can apply to hands, and phrases about hands in the poem and elsewhere may profitably be recalled, e.g. Pilate washed his hands.)

The burden of sin is like a flame whose intolerable heat burns us up, which human power cannot remove, and yet divine fire can purify us. There are those things which we cannot bear ourselves since they are "intolerable" (this word is used in the prayer of confession during the Eucharist in the Anglican Prayer Book.). Yet this flame can enable us to live. We cannot presume on it. We cannot command it. We cannot remove it. So we live and only live, no matter on what level, when we are consumed by some type of fire but it is we who choose the type of fire - either that which can elevate and ennoble or that which degrades and destroys. We choose.

The word "choice" is a reminder that there are certain ideas in this movement which are as obvious as the fact that they are neglected. They merit attention. First is the fact that each human being has an element of choice. That choice is urgent and

fateful, a fact repeatedly pointed out in the teaching of Jesus.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is dynamic, powerful as fire can be powerful. Indeed it has been said that in the NT "power is almost an equivalent" for Holy Spirit.

### God's Merciless Compassion

Thirdly, the NT closely associates him, his actions, and the fruits of his action with love. Here once more Eliot's thought is indebted to "Revelations of Divine Love" by Julian of Norwich, and I take a quotation from it:

"Wouldest thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well; Love was his meaning. Who showed it thee? Love. What showed he thee? Love. Wherefore showed he it? For love."

/5

Evocative of the Spirit's role is a phrase from St. John of the Cross - "the living flame of love"; To such there are, quoting Eliot, adequate responses, "a lifetime's death in love" and expansion "beyond desire". (Little Gidding 1.157 and 204)

Concerning what the NT calls love I sketch further points to be noted. First, we must always remember that the biblical meaning of love is active good will; it is not a matter of liking, or of any sort of merely emotional or sentimental attachment. It is a direction of the will capable of the widest extension, the most complete effort despite the cost.

Secondly, true love can include an element which, if isolated and casually considered, can seem harsh and severe. Apparently stern words can be "the voice of his love". Yet both from the human side and the divine side the stern face of love is genuine love. Therefore it can be an attribute of God while appropriately called "unfamiliar".

I add two further considerations. The phrase "love



of God" is frequently found, especially in the NT, but the  
genitive usage has a degree of ambiguity meaning either  
(a) the love we should have for God or (b) the love  
which God shows to us. I would think that the latter  
is much more appropriate here and we could develop the  
phrase in biblical contexts as a meditation.

But alongside this is the love we should practise  
towards men as well as God and I merely list a few words  
which could be indefinitely expanded in thought, prayer  
and action. These form some of the basic ingredients of  
love - concern, compassion, commitment, involvement,  
identification, self-sacrifice, justice and careful  
thought. They are incarnate in Jesus Christ. /6

Thus the lyric uses two names or emblems of the Holy  
Spirit. The first on which I have just commented is  
love. The second which I have mentioned on several  
occasions is fire and now it may help to repeat some  
suggestive scriptural facts. Where the bush was  
burning there God was and Moses feared to look upon him.  
Fire made the coal live so that it cleansed Isaiah's  
lips. The cloven tongues like as of fire enabled  
followers of Jesus to speak with other tongues. The  
same Jesus was to baptize his followers with the Holy  
Spirit and with fire. /7 Come, Holy Spirit,  
come as the fire!

### Love Redeeming by Fire

So far I have omitted comment on one important  
biblical word linked with fire in the first stanza.  
This is the word "redeemed" and some comment should be  
made. First, we use it seldom today. It is used  
chiefly of stocks and shares and loans. It might  
here be translated "buy back". With this meaning, it is  
also a term used in the game "Monopoly", describing  
mortgaged property and therefore useless to the owner  
while in that condition. It has a similar meaning when  
used of getting back property which has been pawned,  
an occurrence much more familiar half a century ago.

At the present time, we would seldom use it of carrying out a promise, or saving a life, or making amends for a failure though these are legitimate meanings. Today, it could depict the situation of passengers in a hi-jacked aeroplane who feared inevitable destruction and death. If and when freed, they, despite the dangers incurred by them, might say they had been redeemed, set free by others, often at risk, even great cost to their deliverers.

All of these usages help us to grasp biblical meanings of "redeem" which belong to a group of words or synonyms, going back to the original Hebrew context and, later, in the Greek of the Septuagint. "Save", "rescue" and "deliver" are some of its equivalents in English. In the NT, we have Jesus described on one occasion as "Redeemer" (Acts 7.35) (lutrōtēs), his work is described as "redemption" (lutrōsis, apolutrōsis) on a number of occasions (Luke 1.68; 2.38; Hebrews 9.12) but especially linked with his sacrifice on the Cross (lutron: Mark 10.45 and par; apolutrōsis e.g. Romans 3.24; Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 1.14) for the human race. Therefore it is wise to ponder its NT usages, perhaps for meditation or study.

The value of a meditation on the significance of redemption can be enhanced by remembering that it can be linked to slavery. A slave had no claims or rights against his owner, nor had he any time as his "free time." He had no time, no rights and no property that he himself controlled or owned. This was his condition.

But he could be redeemed and become a free man. What a blessing this was! No one could deny the benefit. But the slave, while a slave, had literally no power of himself to help himself. He had no money so there was no way that he could pay the price of freedom, of redemption. Someone else had to do it for him. This was the general background of redemption.

Now for the people of Israel it had an additional meaning, that told in Exodus. /8 To the Israelite the yearly celebration of the Passover reminded him of

ational slavery in Egypt and deliverance at the Red Sea. They would realize forcefully the truth of Eliot's remark that there was no "human power" strong enough to redeem them.

In the NT the whole spiritual significance was transferred to Christ. He was the Redeemer, the Paschal Lamb. He brought redemption and this symbolism underlies many Easter hymns. Meditation on these concepts can awake us to praise and to an awareness of the glory of God. We may seek a "thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise"; we may pray

Come down, O love divine,  
Seek thou this soul of mine,  
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing.....

Confirm my heart's desire  
To think and speak and act for thee."

We participate in the liberation or redemption if this latter term is more meaningful. We are free in Christ, freed by Christ, enabled by the refining fire we call the "Spirit of life". So the Christian theme of "The Dry Salvages" - the incarnation - is supplemented and joined with that of "Little Gidding", the Holy Spirit.

### Focus on the Holy Spirit

Certain words in this lyric appear very prominently - love, fire, redeemed, in the first stanza and, in the second, love, unfamiliar Name and consumed. They all share a common point of reference - God the Spirit, the Life Giver. The love and the fire are both emblems of him and of his operation; his nature and his name are love. The nature of the divine love and its centrality in the Christian conception of the Holy Spirit is well known. Also, the verbs "consumed" and "redeemed" are applicable both to fire and the Spirit though the Spirit's work through the medium of fire might well be an "unfamiliar Name" for love. It can, however, be so designated since love is the dominant force behind every action. This action consumes the cross in our lives and refines our nature. Thereby we

are redeemed.

Concerning redemption, we usually mean Jesus Christ when we speak of the Redeemer, and we can say that the effect of his work was to make available the treasure of redemption. The treasure, however, remains in one pile and it is the Spirit who helps us to appropriate individually our own individual portion. In appreciation we respond; we can say that we are "burned with endless love", as a medieval mystic puts it. /9 We are set afire with love, love for him who is love incarnate for whom nothing save himself is expendable. /10

We have been drawn by love; we have heard the voice. (1.237). Now the pilgrimage is coming to its end. I use the word "end" in two senses - to denote finality and the completion of a purpose. The destination of the pilgrim, that is, his own "Little Gidding", is in sight. The desire of the pilgrim can be fulfilled for the pledge of forgiveness has become a personal reality; the promise of power, the gift of the Spirit, can be obtained. This is so because the pilgrim has heard the call to self surrender, the need for penitence has been heeded.

All this is more fully worked out in the last movement. Its opening words carry us back to the start of the first quartet and the better we know it, the more significance we shall find in the last fifty or so lines. Indeed the themes of baptism and all it means, of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection, and what they accomplished, are latent even if not obvious.

We have been plucked out of a fire that purifies, redeems and refines, that fire which reflects God's holiness. Hence we are at the end of a journey, made as a quest for a shrine, a quest for a purpose. Having reached this end, we shall also make a new beginning. (L.G. 1.214)

## Notes

\*\*\* Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) is generally regarded as one of the most influential of the poets



this century. Born in St Louis, Missouri, U.S.A., he  
cluded Harvard and Oxford in the Universities at which  
studied. He became a British citizen in 1927 and,  
tter joined the Anglican Church. His works reflected his  
tofound knowledge of the Bible and, in particular, his  
ay "Murder in the Cathedral" and poems such as e.g.  
he Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Ash Wednesday",  
"A Song for Simeon".

For fuller background, see my article, "Approaches to  
ttle Gidding". The poem itself was published in 1944  
one of the Four Quartets.

H. Blamires, "The Word Unheard", Methuen, 1969,  
70f. I expand these ideas later. Readers should peruse  
and ponder these other lyrics.

Acts 2.3

St. John 20.22f; Blamires, op.cit. 170

Quoted by G. Huelin, "The Kingdom within you";  
Jeffington 1960, p57.

See also 1 Cor. 13, 1 John passim, St. John 13 and much  
of the NT; books that can repay study on the words I have  
used are: J. MacIntyre, "On the Love of God"; C. Outka,  
ape; V.H. Vanstone, "Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense";  
D. Williams, "The Spirit and the Forms of Love".

Exod.3.2; Isaiah 6.6f; Acts 2.4 and Luke 3.16.

Exod. 12

R. Rolle, "Fire of Love", 2.10

D. V. Vanstone, op.cit. uses this phrase.

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Frank J. Matera, The Kingship of Jesus, Composition and Theology in Mark 15 (SBL Dissertation Series 66), Scholars Press, Chico, PA 95927, 1982 pp x + 222

Matera begins by examining the sections of Mark 15 in order to determine where Mark has been at work. After a minute analysis of words, phrases and themes, he concludes that there was no real pre-Markan passion narrative. Mark constructed the chapter by bringing together existing but isolated portions of tradition. He did this in such a way as to draw attention to the kingship of Jesus. Matera goes on to show that this theme was already present in earlier parts of the gospel, especially in chapters 11 and 12 which indeed prepare us for the royal theme of chapter 15. After examining Mark's use of the term "Son of Man" and "Son of God" he argues that royal Messianism is the linchpin of Markan christology. Within chapter 15 the several mockeries of Jesus highlight the reference to him as king.

This is an interesting and well presented thesis. The royal theme is brought to light in a fresh way. Doubts must exist, however, as to the manner in which the conclusion is reached. In particular, Matera's conclusion in respect of his redactional analysis can hardly be true: "Mark assembled the chapter from earlier traditions in much the same way as he constructed the rest of his gospel." (p147) Most of the material outside the passion narrative circulated without, or at least with only minimal, temporal and spatial data. Mark was thus free to insert it in his outline wherever he wished. But the material about the trial before Pilate, Barabbas, the several mockeries, the crucifixion, all of which Matera believes Mark derived from the tradition, could never have been "free-floating" pieces (p33). The only reason they were preserved was their connection with the passion. The account of the Last Supper may well have had an independent existence in a liturgical setting but what independent existence could the other items have had? Mark cannot, then, have had as much

freedom in the construction of the narrative as Matera proposes. If Mark created many of the incidents or had several passion narratives in front of him from which he could select such material as he wished, then the way Matera imagines him to have worked would be possible. Matera does not argue that Mark created incidents nor does he seem to allow for the possibility that he had several passion narratives available for use. Failure to discuss how the material existed prior to its use by Mark negates much of what Matera has done and must put a large question mark over his methods. His main result, the presence of the royal theme in chapter 15, may, however, still be true.

. Andrews

Ernest Best

on Elsdon, Bent World: Science, the Bible and the Environment

Inter-Varsity Press 1981 pp170 £2.95

Rowland Moss, The Earth in our Hands

Inter-Varsity Press 1982, pp125 £1.65

It is strange that the same publisher should issue in successive years books on identical topics. One asks - half facetiously - how many forests were pulped for this duplicated discussion of ecology! The authors, Christian academics - Ron Elsdon lectures in geology at University College, Dublin and Rowland Moss is professor of geography at the University of Salford - both refute vigorously the caricature of the Bible and Christianity endorsing mankind's greedy exploitation of the world's resources. Both point out that such exploitation and pollution pre-date Christianity and that the whole balance of biblical teaching requires responsible stewardship of creation rather than irresponsible subjugation and

squandering. Both present a challenge to Christians and especially to evangelicals to face up to all the implications of salvation which cannot be solely "otherworldly" if we take seriously the doctrines of creation and incarnation.

Elsdon's presentation is both more detailed, with well referenced footnotes and index, and clearer and easier to read. The cover illustration alone is worth the difference in price. I cannot help feeling that the shorter book would have been better presented as a long magazine article. Even so those wanting something shorter and cheaper will find it a useful introduction to ecological issues that face the believer. I found particularly helpful Moss's discussion on: "Where was death before the Fall?" (pp54-58).

In his understandable desire to stress the link between creation and redemption Elsdon has perhaps overstated his case. The "wonderful deeds" of 1 Peter 2.9 (misprinted as vs10 in p130) refer primarily to the mercy received by God's redeemed people, although he could cite more plausibly 2 Cor.4.6 to assert a link between the creator of light and the light of redemption. I am surprised that he is surprised at the harvest thanksgiving being so popular in a materialistic age. Materialistically minded man, if he thinks of God at all, is likely to think of the benefits of creation in the harvest (p130). The problem here for the church is to persuade the world that redemption matters and to persuade her own members that creation matters! At this point Elsdon follows the trend that suggests that in the sacraments God is worshipped as creator as well as redeemer, but this is to redress the balance of emphasis in favour of creation further than scripture indicates. Explicitly, the sacraments are linked to the atoning death of Christ and it is misleading to detract from this, however much it is right to show - as both books do - that God cares for the world and cares that we should care.

Some minor points: in Moss, p112, Deuteronomy 81 should be 31 and it would be helpful to be told what the "Wesley principle" is for the use of money (p119); In Elsdon, p127, Job 24.23 does not assure those who love God of security but, problematically, the wicked.



Donald Guthrie, New Testament Theology

Inter-Varsity Press 1981. pp 1064 np

This massive book - note the 1064 pages - is aimed at 'serious students of the NT.' It is divided up into ten sections apart from the Introduction (21-74): God (75-115), Man and his world (116-218), Christology (219-407), The mission of Christ (408-509), The Holy Spirit (510-572), The Christian life (573-700), The Church (701-789), The future (790-892), The NT approach to Ethics (893-952) and Scripture (953-982). The Bibliography covers some 36 pages while Indices include references, authors and subjects.

In the valuable introduction, he surveys briefly the development of the study of NT theology, its nature and method and relationship to dogmatics and the limitations of a purely literary approach. The wholly analytical approach has its weaknesses. It "takes up one type of literature (e.g. the synoptic gospels) and treats the major themes of that source as the sum total of the writer's tenets." (36) Dr Guthrie urges caution with any kind of method which drives too deep a wedge between the theology of John and the synoptics or between the synoptics themselves, and quotes Riesenfeld to the effect that 'what the gospels have in common must be more significant and important than what is peculiar to each' (37, N56).

Under the theme "The place of personality in the NT" (38-40), he questions whether it is correct to claim e.g. that Paul must always be a creative theologian and therefore, since they do not appear consistent with this claim, to discard the possibility that he might have written the "stereotyped" doctrine of the pastoral letters (39f). Again, on "History and Existentialism", he suggests that the existentialist hermeneutic "instead of clarifying....obscures theology by using terms in an almost intelligible way" (46); on "Variety and unity within the NT" (49-59), he deprecates the bias toward diversity in some theologians (cf on J.D.G. Dunn's exaggeration of the diversity, p55, N93) but does agree that "the understanding of the person of Christ did not

come in a cataclysmic way" but "seems rather to have been revealed piecemeal" (51); on the other hand, the principle of unity in the NT is to be found in the "all-pervasive activity of the Holy Spirit." (56); on "The relevance of background studies for NT theology" (59-70), the themes are touched upon so slightly even if concisely that their value must be limited e.g. there is no reference to Targumic studies; on "The structure of NT Theology" (71-74), Dr. Guthrie sees two basic methods open to the NT theologian whether (1) to split the NT into its various literary groups and look at the theology of each or (2) to select major themes and make them the main divisions of the work. The latter, with all its dangers of imposing dogmatic positions on the NT, is the alternative he chooses, under the firm conviction that the NT is the revelation of God and not of man (73).

And with all the considerable care that Dr Guthrie exercises, nevertheless, he does not entirely escape from the risks of his method. Dealing with the Virgin Birth (365-374), e.g. he does not mention the miraculous circumstances of the Baptist's birth, viz, the age of the parents, the dumbness of Zacharias, and the way in which the name is bestowed (Luke 1.5-25; 57-80) as one example of the parallels with which Luke structures his gospel and which show perhaps the weight that should be attached to the stories; to argue, as Guthrie does, from the space given in his gospel to the nativity stories in Luke, that the virgin birth must form an integral part in any account of early Christian theology does not make it clear what is meant by "early Christian theology" since the nativity stories come later than Mark or Paul nor what place Mark or Paul have in this; that Mark does use "carpenter" of Jesus and not, as Matthew, "carpenter's son" (Mk 6.3 and Mt 13.55) and tells us that the people of Nazareth referred to Jesus as Mary's son, contrary to normal Jewish procedure (368) hardly makes up for the fact that Mark at no point shows an awareness of the Virgin Birth nor is it important for him presumably; again, Dr Guthrie does try to argue on the basis of Paul's use of genomenos ("become") and not gennōmenos ("begotten") in Romans 1.3 ("descended from David according to the



lesh"), Gal 4.4 ("born of woman") and Philippians 2.7 ("born in the likeness of men") that Paul distinguishes the birth of Jesus from that of other men but this is by no means certain since genomenos is sometimes used with reference to birth and in any case, Paul does use gennaō but never in reference to Jesus' birth (cf, as examples, Cor 4.15; Philemon 10). Just how much importance is attached to the Virgin Birth by Dr Guthrie is shown by the final sentence to this section: "without it (i.e. Virgin Birth) our total understanding of NT theology would be defective"(374). The student of theology must be grateful to Dr Guthrie for marshalling the evidence for and against the Virgin Birth and for his positive approach to the NT evidence - and indeed characteristic of his approach as a whole. Later in his work, Dr Guthrie declares, "What is most significant in the assertion that Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit is the implication that the whole mission, including the incarnation was directed by the Spirit." (517)

Another treatment indicative of the same risks involved in starting with dogmatic presuppositions is that on "the sinlessness of Jesus" (228-234). It may be true of the gospel records that "never at any time did Jesus make confession of sin" (228) but it is equally true that a church which starts with the presupposition that Jesus was sinless is hardly likely to create such a statement but would shrink from the very suggestion. This does not prevent it being equally true that the church had a conviction of the goodness of Jesus of a unique kind which did not need necessarily to be articulated but is a presupposition behind all the NT letters whether made explicit or not. The familiar problems connected with Matthew's account of the hesitation of the Baptist in relation to Jesus' baptism are not mentioned on page 28 (Matthew 3.14) though the tendency of the tradition to develop on these lines is well-known. Again, how far is it possible to claim that the words, "Get behind me, Satan", show a more acute reference to the presence of Satan than might be found in others? (229) Or that when Jesus says, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", is he really implying that he was perfect? Any more

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than the Jewish teacher who says, "Be Holy for Yahweh is holy" is necessarily implying that he is holy?

Such criticisms are not intended to minimize the magnitude of the task Dr Guthrie has undertaken and carried through with characteristic thoroughness and attention to detail, not to speak of his generally fair approach to the viewpoint of others. Rather they are the expression of one who would like to be convinced about the arguments put forward in certain important areas but, sadly, the problems still stubbornly remain.

This remarkable attempt at NT Theology, however, should be on the shelves of every student of theology and every minister who wishes to have to hand a reference book where he may be able to cope with the questions of the concerned and thoughtful parishioner.

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